

July 20, 2022

Via Email: OkeechobeeWatershedRestoration@usace.army.mil

Colonel James L. Booth
Department of the Army
Jacksonville District, USACOE
James.L.Booth@usace.army.mil

Re: Southeast Florida Utility Council's Comments on the LOWRP Third Revised Draft
PIR/SEIS

Dear Colonel Booth:

This letter is in response to the June 15, 2022, release of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) Third Revised Draft Project Implementation Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (PIR/SEIS) for public comment.

The Southeast Florida Utility Council (SEFLUC) represents water and wastewater utilities throughout Southeast Florida who provide potable water to over 6 million Floridians and visitors to our great state. SEFLUC's mission is to provide a communications, networking, and support structure for member utilities to continue to provide superior-quality water supply and wastewater management services to its customers in a cost-effective manner. SEFLUC members rely on the regional water system to provide the necessary water supply to our surface and ground water sources as well as to protect these sources by controlling saltwater intrusion.

The revised Recommended Plan for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (identified as Alternative ASR) consists of 55 watershed aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) wells with a maximum storage volume of approximately 308,000 acre-feet per year and two wetland restoration sites. With ASR storage, water can be stored in the Upper Florida Aquifer during wet times to reduce the duration of high lake stages and can be released into the lake later to reduce the impacts of low stages during dry times. In addition to reducing damaging discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries by 21% compared to the Future Without Conditions, the Corps' evaluation indicates the Recommended Plan will also increase the availability of water supply by reducing the frequency and severity of water restrictions in the Lake Okeechobee Service Area. When compared to the Future Without Conditions, the Recommended Plan reduces water supply cutback volumes by 35%. The LOWRP Recommended Plan is one of the few Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan projects to include tangible improvements to water supply.

The Southeast Florida Utility Council supports the Alternative ASR Recommended Plan and encourages the Corps to move forward expeditiously with the completion of the Chief's Report so the LOWRP plan can be included in authorization of Water Resources Development Act of 2022.

We look forward to continuing to participate in the federal project planning process and working with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ana T. Caveda". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Ana T. Caveda, PE
Chair, Southeast Florida Utility Council

cc: SEFLUC Members